

CLAIM AMENDMENTS:

Please amend the claims in the subject patent application as follows:

1. (currently amended) A process for preparing a silica/rubber blend which ~~comprises~~ consists of (1) dispersing silica, a silica coupling agent, and a low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber throughout a cement of a conventional rubbery polymer wherein the silica, the silica coupling agent, and the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber are dispersed throughout the cement of the conventional rubbery polymer at a minimum temperature of about ~~25°C~~ 50°C and a maximum temperature of 130°C, wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber has a weight average molecular weight which is within the range of 50,000 to 200,000, wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is selected from the group consisting of functionalized polybutadiene rubbers and functionalized styrene-butadiene rubbers, wherein the cement of the conventional rubbery polymer is comprised of the conventional rubbery polymer and an organic solvent, and wherein the silica is present at a level which is within the range of 40 phr to 200 phr, and (2) subsequently recovering the silica/rubber blend from the organic solvent.
2. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the low molecular weight end functionalized diene rubber has a weight average molecular weight that is within the range of about 65,000 to about 150,000.
3. (currently amended) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the treated silica and the silica coupling agent are dispersed throughout the cement of the rubbery polymer at a minimum temperature of ~~25°C~~ 60°C and a maximum temperature of 90°C.
4. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 2 wherein the low molecular weight end-functionalized diene rubber is functionalized with a tetraalkoxysilane.

5. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 4 wherein the tetraalkoxysilane is tetraethoxysilane.

6. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 4 wherein the tetraalkoxysilane is tetramethoxysilane.

7. (canceled)

8. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the silica is present at a level which is within the range of 50 phr to 150 phr.

9. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the silica coupling agent is present at a level which is within the range of 2 phr to 20 phr.

10. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 8 wherein the silica coupling agent is present at a level which is within the range of 3 phr to 15 phr.

11. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 9 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is present at a level which is within the range of 4 phr to 20 phr.

12. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 10 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is present at a level which is within the range of 5 phr to 15 phr.

13. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 11 wherein the silica coupling agent is present at a level which is within the range of 4 phr to 8 phr.

14. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 13 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is present at a level which is within the range of 6 phr to 10 phr.

15. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 2 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is comprised of repeat units that are derived from 1,3-butadiene and styrene.

16. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is comprised of repeat units that are derived from 1,3-butadiene.

17. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 4 wherein the low molecular weight end functionalized diene rubber has a weight average molecular weight that is within the range of about 75,000 to about 125,000.

18. (canceled)

19. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the silica is a precipitated silica having a particle size which is within the range of 7 nm to 60 nm.

20. (canceled)